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**JEWS IN THE ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE,  
1940-1945**

**Introduction**

During World War II, Jewish Canadians enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in substantially higher numbers than their proportion of the national population. In contrast, Jewish enlistment in the Army (especially its combat units) and in the Navy was below national levels. Why did young Jewish men demonstrate a clear preference for the RCAF? How well disposed was the Air Force to receiving and deploying its Jewish volunteers? How did those volunteers fare in the RCAF, and did they encounter any barriers to achievement and advancement? What accounts for the remarkable preponderance of Jews as navigators (and under-representation as pilots) in bomber crews?

At the mid-point of the Second World War, 45% of Jews in Canada's armed forces were in the RCAF.<sup>1</sup> By war's end, almost 60 % of Canada's Jewish war dead had met their fate in Air Force uniform, a much higher proportion than the national average.<sup>2</sup> Of the seventeen men listed in the honour roll of Montreal's leading Conservative synagogue, all but one died in the service of the RCAF.<sup>3</sup> Of the nearly five hundred Ottawa Jews who served, half were in the RCAF.<sup>4</sup>

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**Jewish preference for the RCAF**

What accounts for this apparent preference among young Jewish men for Air Force service? It would be difficult to know the motives of those who enlisted over seventy years ago, but some inducements can be identified. For those who voluntarily enlisted and wanted to get into action, the Air Force provided the most immediate opportunity to do so in the early years of the conflict. By the late spring of 1940, Allied armies in Europe were in retreat or defeat, and there was no prospect of ground invasion for years to come. The Royal Canadian Navy had not yet begun its expansion. Air power was the only means of carrying the fight to German territory. Flying held tremendous appeal for young men at that time, but was out of reach for most, even as a passenger let alone as a pilot. Air Force service offered the opportunity to fly, and had a reputation for relying more on dash than on drill, in contrast to infantry service. Under the British Commonwealth Air Training Program (BCATP), aircrew would graduate at least as sergeants (i.e. non-commissioned officers or NCOs), and most would learn a valuable technical trade.<sup>5</sup> As well, the horror and futility of trench warfare, experienced only a generation before, had not been forgotten. Better to die in the air than to come home maimed from army service. These considerations would have appealed to a broad range of young Canadian men, but some perhaps had a particular appeal to Jewish Canadians.

As Richard Overy observed, in explaining the Allied victory over the Axis:

The application of technological strength through air power compensated for the difficulties in turning civilians with little experience of military life into effective soldiers. Western forces preferred the bomb to the bayonet.<sup>6</sup>

Turning citizens into servicemen was not an insignificant challenge for democratic countries that did not rely on martial values and a militaristic culture. Jewish citizens, in particular, were not renowned for their traditions of military service, their

familiarity with firearms and the weapons of war, or their enthusiasm for hand to hand combat. Bombing from the air distanced the infliction of death and destruction on the ground. Evading death in the air put a premium on skill and dexterity over physical size and strength.

Some early entries in the war diary of Percy Jacobson, from Montreal, about his son's prospective enlistment, illustrate these concerns:<sup>7</sup>

For several days now, in fact ever since the war, I have had Joe on my mind...I know that he can't keep out of it. First of all we are Jews and Hitler's persecution of the Jews will go down into history along with the stories of the Spanish Inquisition. Second of all even if he felt war was wrong and realized the wickedness of destroying the youth of the world he couldn't stand by and see his friends fight for him. And third as a graduate of McGill with a fine record in the classroom and on the field, he would lose caste in his own eyes as well as with his fellow men. (13 September 1939)

I am hoping that my son will keep out of the war until we in Canada know just what we are expected to do. So far nobody seems to know. (17 September 1939)

God grant that he may be allowed to be of more use to this Canada of ours than holding a rifle. That he may be called upon to do something better for his Alma Mater than stick some poor devil in the belly with a bayonet. (18 September 1939)

For Percy Jacobson, his son's military service was both inevitable and necessary. Yet he wanted him to exercise caution about how and when to enlist. If his son had to fight, he wanted him to contribute effectively and to the best of his abilities, and minimize the risk of brutal and senseless death.<sup>8</sup>

### **Jewish acceptance in the RCAF**

Jews being so well represented in the RCAF seemed an improbable outcome to at least some in the Jewish community in the first months of the war. Jews were at that time barred from housing and public accommodation in some districts, limited by quotas in some universities and professions, and unwelcome in most corporations and clubs. Suspicions that similar discrimination might be encountered in the military, and especially in the elite air and naval services, were inevitable. Percy Jacobson commented on his son's prospects for enlistment in his diary:<sup>9</sup>

Jews are not wanted in the air force and certain regiments. (18 September, 1939)

I am not sure whether the Navy takes Jews. (4 October, 1939)

It seems to be as hard to get into the Canadian Air Force as a snooty club. (7 June, 1940)

Yet these suspicions, however plausible, were grounded neither in existing air force regulations nor in the new circumstances of 1940. By June of that year, Canada's newly established Air Training Program needed all the qualified candidates it could obtain, and then some. An air force that had graduated no more than fifty pilots a year was now committed to turning out over a thousand trained airmen every month. In the face of a new and desperate situation, old ways of doing things, along with existing attitudes and prejudices, would need to give way.

But what were these existing attitudes and prejudices, and how did they affect the recruitment of Jews, if at all? In fact, it was Canadians of non-European background who were explicitly excluded from air force recruiting and from commissions.<sup>10</sup> Although the Cabinet War Committee stated in December 1941 that no rank or service should be closed to any Canadian simply because of race or colour, it simultaneously drew attention to practical difficulties in mixing races, and added that "Neither

fighting efficiency nor civilian morale should be sacrificed to the principle of racial equality.”<sup>11</sup> These recruiting restrictions were only gradually lifted, mainly from 1942 onwards.<sup>12</sup>

The only explicit RCAF recruiting exclusions based on “undesirable racial background” regarding persons of European origin in the summer of 1940 applied to Germans and Italians.<sup>13</sup> There were no mandated barriers to Jewish enlistment, and Jews could and did enroll in Canadian Officer Training Corps units from the beginning.

There were effectively three considerations that affected Canada’s armed services recruitment policies in 1940: morale, loyalty, and fighting qualities. The first applied mainly to non-whites, based on the concern that Canadians of European origin might be unwilling to serve alongside them in combat units. The second applied to Germans, Italians, and (later) Japanese Canadians. Only the third had any significant effect on Jews, perhaps more tangentially than directly, and with respect to advancement within rather than recruitment to the services, as will be explored further below.

Where old attitudes and prejudices did come into play was the self-congratulatory view (widespread in Britain’s Royal Air Force and, not coincidentally, to some degree in the RCAF), that courage and fighting grit, as well as flying abilities, were the preserve of the white race and in particular the peoples of the British Isles.<sup>14</sup> There remained, in senior British ranks, a view that the military virtues of steadfastness and calm in the face of danger, initiative, and athleticism were most likely to be found in the public schools, and especially among the sons of the landed gentry. These virtues were seen as the product of breeding and background, a matter of class as well as of race. Intellect or specific skills, in this view, counted for rather less. It followed that Jews, as well as other non-British peoples, were less likely to have these virtues.

Yet, some factors worked to the advantage of Jews seeking to enlist in the RCAF, not least that (at the outset) a minimum of junior matriculation was required for entry. Of all

the service branches, the Air Force was the most technically and scientifically advanced. Its air crews required men of the highest mental skills and physical dexterity. While the junior matriculation requirement likely constituted an effective barrier for some other elements of the Canadian population otherwise eligible for recruitment (not least French-Canadians and Aboriginals), it provided if anything an advantage for Jews, a relatively high proportion of whom could meet the academic requirement.<sup>15</sup> Canadian youth who had the connections or the education were better positioned to join their preferred branch of service, and to advance in it by obtaining a commission. What Jews might have lacked by way of connections, they made up for by their education. Thus, the disproportionate numbers of Jewish Canadians in Air Force service was likely due to a combination of the inducements offered by service in the RCAF, the lack of any mandated barriers to entry, and ability of many Jews to meet the entrance requirements.

Nonetheless, the RCAF was at the outset of the war overwhelmingly English-speaking and Protestant. Of a sample of fifty men who entered the RCAF in the summer of 1940,<sup>16</sup> forty-one were Protestant, five Catholic, three Jewish, and one Syrian Orthodox. Most of the fifty had Canadian-born parents. Of the non-Canadian born parents, almost all had emigrated from Britain. Only six had come from Europe (Russia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine), and two from present-day Lebanon. Practically all came from middle-class backgrounds, and their work experience was generally white collar. If this sample was representative, it was the logical outcome of the ethnic makeup and socio-economic status of the Canadian population, differing willingness to enlist among the various sectors of the population, and existing recruitment biases.

### **Assessment by the RCAF**

Just because there were no formal barriers to Jewish enlistment in the RCAF does not mean that the force was blind to religious or ethnic background. As in civilian life, Jews were subject to

critical judgment in a way that their Protestant or Catholic fellow citizens were not. In the context of military service those judgments focused, as already noted, on character traits ascribed to Jews, in negative contrast to those allegedly inherent in persons of Anglo-Saxon background. If Jews were thought not to possess the sturdiness of body and tenacity of will to prevail on the playing field and on the frontier, could they endure the suffering and hardship of battle, remain steadfast and stoic in adversity, and so lead and inspire other men in war? These did not seem to be inappropriate questions in 1940, even to those not otherwise motivated by prejudice, although there were sometimes inappropriate or unsupportable answers. Nor were these questions absent from the minds of military leaders in Canada or Britain as the war got underway. Such doubts were sometimes expressed by both commanders and enlisted men about all those of non-British stock, but most especially about Jews. There may well have been senior RCAF officers who were less than enthusiastic about Jewish recruits at the beginning of the war.<sup>17</sup>

Existing attitudes within the RCAF may be discerned especially from the initial assessments of Jewish volunteers. These assessments are recorded chiefly in the interview report upon enlistment, and the recheck medical exam at the end of the first month at Initial Training School. Neither document required specification of religion or ethnicity, however the identification of a recruit as “Jewish” or “Hebrew” is often found in the overall character assessment. Here is a range of comments about Jewish recruits found in a sample of those documents.<sup>18</sup>

Hebrew, quite pleasant, self assured, ambitious, good physique, will be rather pushing. Polite, rather rough due to background. (interview report, 4 April 1940)

Hebrew descent but good type. (interview report, 22 April 1940)

One of the best Jewish lads I have ever met. (interview report, 13 May 1940)

Very good type – should make good air gunner.

Hebrew – but not noticeable. (interview report, 17 June 1940)

Jewish – rather dark featured. Appears to be made of good stuff. Recommend that he be given his choice as pilot. (#1 Initial Training School report, July 1940)

Rather stable Hebrew. (medical board report, 27 July 1940)

Athletic and educational qualification good. Rather off hand and sure of himself. These plus racial characteristics may be a factor in his relation with associates. Good average – doubtful of his ability to handle men. (medical board report, 7 August 1940)

A very good Jewish Canadian type. (interview report, 14 November 1940)

Good type of Hebrew. (medical board report, 22 November 1940)

Jewish lad of good type. (medical board report, 14 June 1941)

These comments (which I have ordered chronologically) range from mere observation, to discernment of good character despite being Jewish, to confirmation of “undesirable” Jewish characteristics that could be corrected, or if not could be limiting. Pupil reports, which came later in the training process, almost never contain outright notations of Jewishness, although some contain what might be seen as coded comments about Jewish characteristics, such as:

A loud type. Always wisecracking. Not particularly popular...(pupil air observer report, 26 April 1941)

Noisy, talkative type. (pupil air observer report, 20 February 1942)

Odd if not positively offensive as these assessments would be regarded today, at that time Jewish identity was commonly noted if not also remarked on in civilian life, and so



it appears to have been in the RCAF. Taken in isolation, these comments might be seen as confirmation of anti-semitism in the military. Against this, however, is the fact that such notations, and especially adverse ones, were the exception not the rule. Good, bad or indifferent, they appear in less than a quarter of the files reviewed. Most were recorded in the first wave of air force recruitment, and appear to be less frequent over time. Consideration should be given as well to the numerous recollections of Jewish servicemen of the camaraderie, tolerance, and the absence of discrimination in the military.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the largely subjective and sometimes gratuitous preliminary assessments (made by interviewers and medical board chairs who were commonly veterans of the previous war), range from highly laudatory to dourly uncomplimentary, in proportions seemingly no different from their assessments of gentile recruits.<sup>20</sup> During the course of recruitment and training, it was not at all uncommon for the same individual to receive markedly different assessments along the way about his character, work habits, aptitude, and potential.

### **Trade Selection and Advancement**

How significant were these initial assessments, and what consequences did they have for the new recruits? Leaving casual derogatory remarks aside (which all Jewish servicemen must have encountered from time to time, whether from their commanders, their examiners, or their fellow airmen), if Jewish servicemen did encounter particular stereotypes or prejudices, how did these affect their careers? Did they act as barriers to their achievement and advancement in the RCAF? If so, can this be measured by quantitative indicators rather than anecdotes?

To try to answer these questions, I tabulated the basic demographic characteristics and military status of the approximately two hundred and forty-five Jews who died in RCAF uniform between 1940 and 1945.<sup>21</sup> Four measures offer themselves for consideration: promotions, aircrew trade selection, commissions, and decorations. I consider the first only briefly, as

promotions were essentially routine within non-commissioned ranks. Upon completion of the air training program in Canada, the graduate received his badge, his wings, and promotion to sergeant rank. Promotion to flight sergeant almost invariably occurred within a year of graduation. Very few Jewish flying crew were still sergeants at time of death, mainly those who did not survive long enough to be promoted. The great majority of Jews who died as non-commissioned officers (NCOs) had already become flight sergeants or warrant officers.

I therefore focus on trade selection and commissions, and conclude with a brief consideration of decorations. Although in the BCATP a recruit was selected for a specific trade long before being formally considered for a commission, the two indicators are inter-related and each requires some explanation.

By 1940, the RAF's forecast requirements were mainly for the strategic air offensive against Germany, and the campaigns against enemy shipping and U-boats at sea. These were conducted by Bomber Command and Coastal Command respectively. The purpose of the Air Training Program was to provide recruits with the skill sets necessary to operate the aircraft used for those purposes, which were in both cases bombers (or fighter-bombers) that required pilots, air observers (responsible for both navigation and bomb-aiming), wireless operators, and air gunners. Pilots and observers were the hands and head of the aircraft, wireless operators and air gunners were its ears and eyes. The primary function of the initial training schools, where one's flying career began, was to stream recruits into one of three trades – pilot, air observer, or wireless operator/air gunner (WO/AG) – in the proportions that complete air crews required.<sup>22</sup>

As already noted, in British military tradition, a man was nominally commissioned on the basis of his leadership capabilities. Character rather than intellect or specific skills was what counted. The key elements of an officer's character were considered to be courage (not least, steadfastness and calm in the face of danger), initiative, and athleticism. An officer was

traditionally also a gentleman, and the mystique of class was thought to inspire the men under his command.<sup>23</sup> These qualities, along with a measure of daring and recklessness, were also required of pilots, who in the early days of military aviation were invariably commissioned officers.

The BCATP, however, was not intended to be a training ground for officers. Trade selection at initial training schools had above all to determine the aptitude of the new recruit for each trade, as well as his ability to complete his training within the approximately eight months provided for. Suitability for commissioning was a secondary consideration, and in fact many operational air crews in the early years of the war consisted largely or entirely of NCOs. Under the exigencies of a modern air war, old school methods of selection for character and leadership were being replaced by nominally scientific methods of physical and psychological aptitude testing. Leadership, courage, and character were still important, but even more so was competence.<sup>24</sup>

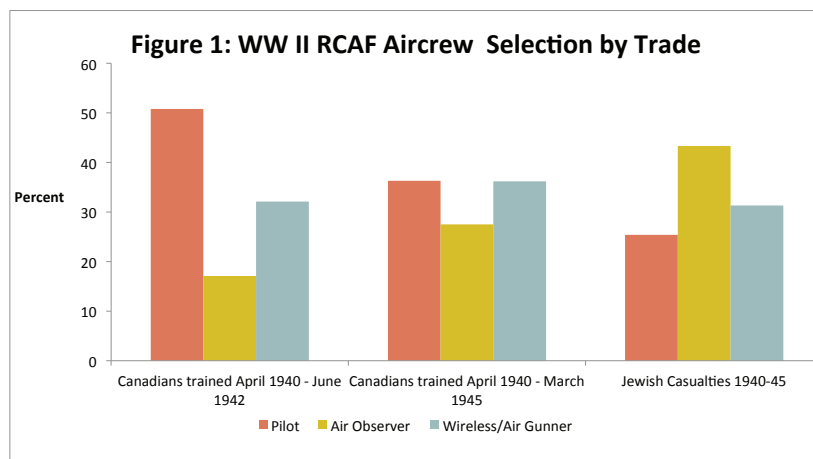
The appropriate balance between leadership and competence as the basis for aircrew commissions was the subject of competing viewpoints. Aptitude for a particular trade, and even success in it, did not predict courage and competence in the face of danger. Achievement in ground school and air exercises did not necessarily provide adequate grounding in military practice and leadership beyond the confines of the aircraft itself. Although pilots would automatically be the captains of the aircraft they flew, their training in Canada emphasized flying skills, not leadership skills. The basis for commissioning flying crew would be the subject of debate all through the war, within and between senior personnel in the RCAF and the RAF, and in their respective Air Ministries.<sup>25</sup>

These two indicators – trade selection and commissioning – were not independent of each other. Under the BCATP, the first opportunity for appointment to commissioned rank was upon completion of training. Eligibility was based on course standing, determined largely by demonstrated

proficiency in the air and on the ground. Less than 20% of the total mark was based on subjective assessments of suitability for commissioning. But the proportion of each class that was actually commissioned varied by trade. The top third of each pilot and air observer course was commissioned immediately upon graduation. The next tranche of graduates down to the mid-point of the class would be eligible for early commission based on individual performance in operations. The bottom half of each class was not disqualified from receiving commissions, but they might have to wait a long time. However, only the top 10 % of wireless operators and air gunners were eligible for immediate commission.

Thus, all those early assessments of suitability for commissioning found in interview reports and medical boards counted for little by the time of graduation. What did count was that the senior air force ranks considered pilots and air observers to be the core of the bomber crew and that operational success would depend above all upon their skills, which is why they were commissioned in much higher proportion than wireless operators and air gunners. The trade for which a recruit was selected in Initial Training School strongly determined his subsequent flying career, not least his prospects for commissioning and decoration.

How then did Jews fare in their first few weeks at Initial Training School, with respect to trade selection? Figure 1 compares the overall percentage of recruits selected as pilots, air observers, and WO/AGs during the course of the BCATP, with the percentage of Jews selected for these trades. The first set of columns shows BCATP output for each trade, expressed as percent of total, as of mid-1942. Considering that the medium bomber aircraft of 1940 required a crew of four to six men, normally a pilot and second pilot, an air observer, one or two WO/AGs, and an air gunner, it follows that the highest demand was for pilots, the lowest was for air observers. In fact, during its first two years, 51% of the BCATP's graduates were pilots, 17 % were air observers, and 32% were WO/AGs or AGs. The



final totals as of 1945 (the middle set of columns) were 36, 28, and 36% respectively, which reflected the changing air crew requirements of the newer heavy bombers.<sup>26</sup>

The third set of columns, however, shows that among Jewish air crew, nearly half were air observers, and only one quarter were pilots. As those figures are only for persons killed while flying, might they be unrepresentative in relation to total trade selection? As each crew member had a virtually equal chance of being killed in an operational loss or flying accident, it is reasonable to assume that the numbers do in fact represent the overall distribution of Jews in bomber crew trades. There were, of course, Jews who were selected for pilot training who washed out before completion. In the early years the overall failure rate in elementary flying training was about 20%, but there is no reason to believe that Jews were less successful in flying training than anyone else. Most of those who washed out of flying training (almost all of whom were gentiles) were re-mustered as air observers, so this cannot account for the observed difference. The reality is that Jews were much less likely to be selected for flying training in the first place. Moreover, this pattern does not appear to have changed much over the course of the war.

These data are sufficiently striking to call for an explanation. But first we need to understand the critical differences

between pilots and air observers. These related on the one hand to the actual skills required, and on the other to air crew command structure in the RAF (and perforce in the BCATP), at the outset of the war. Air observers were seen as requiring mental skills, in particular the ability to calculate quickly, continuously, and accurately under duress. Pilots were seen as more action oriented, required to have more physical skills, hand-eye coordination, “air sense,” and quickness of decision-making. In the early days of aviation, there was a not uncommon view in senior military circles that these pilot skills, along with courage and leadership, were the preserve of the white race if not indeed specifically of the Anglo-Saxon race.<sup>27</sup> More importantly, the bomber aircraft was a combat unit, of which the pilot was the commander. He was the captain of his crew, even if he was not commissioned.<sup>28</sup> In the extreme, the fate of his crew relied not only on his skills but also on his leadership and judgment.

Some anecdotal evidence suggests that Jews were stereotyped as smart or intellectual and thus well qualified to be navigators.<sup>29</sup> Joe Jacobson wrote his friends, the day the selections were announced in his ITS course:

...to-day our fate was decided and we have been divided up for the duration of the war into gunners, observers and pilots. The ratio is as follows:

observers . . . .	18%	. . . .	100
pilots . . . . .	35%	. . . .	200
gunners. . . . .	46%	. . . .	250

Ace Jacobson is I am unhappy to announce an observer...We start from scratch again also we don't do too much flying. We learn navigation, photography, gunnery & piloting but our position is still that of the master minds – we don't get the real kick out of the thing that the pilots do. For once I was hoping to get a job where brains don't count...However, a college grad. has no chance of becoming a pilot under present circumstances, but is compensated by being booked for the responsible jobs from the

beginning...Of the eight Jewish boys, only one is a gunner. (21 August 1940)<sup>30</sup>

Jacobson's account cannot be the whole explanation, however. Likely more important was the traditional military conception of leadership, and in the kind of person the necessary qualities would most likely be found. What were characterized as "racial characteristics" (in the words of one of the medical board reports cited above) were still seen to be important. Isolated as the comment may have been, the view that both aviation and leadership were associated with the British "race" still had some currency. Although the output of men would soon outpace the production of aircraft, perhaps men of British ancestry were still seen as the best bets for pilot selection, while others could be directed to the other air trades. Such a view would have applied especially to Jews, given the not uncommon stereotypes in military circles, but might also have applied to others of non-British ancestry.<sup>31</sup> An examination of the fate of French Canadian or Ukrainian recruits might perhaps reveal a similar pattern. There were of course Jewish pilots,<sup>32</sup> but the preponderance of Jews selected for training as air observers, in comparison to the general population, seems too striking to be mere coincidence.

Patterns of commissioning and decoration followed from trade selection. In the outcome, one hundred and sixteen Jews were commissioned out of two hundred and eleven eligible air trade graduates (55%). Of the ninety-five NCOs, fifty seven were killed after 1942, a lower proportion of all deaths in the latter part of the war, which is consistent with the changes in commissioning policy at that time. As the initial eligibility for all trades combined upon graduation was well under a third, a significant number of these commissions must have been granted on the basis of later performance. In the absence of information on the overall proportion of air crew who were commissioned, there is no hard evidence to suggest that Jews failed to get their share of commissions (at least at the entry ranks of Pilot Officer and Flying Officer).

It would be possible to determine the proportion of air crew who were commissioned by trade or religious affiliation or other recorded characteristic, although a very substantial research effort would be required to do so. However, there are a number of confounding factors that would make direct comparison among such groups difficult. These would include whether the commission was granted on the basis only of class standing or of later performance in operations, as well as when the commission was granted, in relation to policy changes over the course of the war.

Fifty Jewish Canadian airmen received the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) or Medal (DFM).<sup>33</sup> Eighteen of these decorations were awarded to pilots, twenty-six to air observers, and three to other trades.<sup>34</sup> This constituted 1.1% of the four thousand five hundred and seventy four DFCs and DFMs awarded to RCAF air crew during World War Two, or somewhat less than their proportion of air force personnel. No statistical significance can be attached to such numbers, and any direct comparison is fraught with confounding factors. Small as the discrepancy may be, it likely stems from trade selection, as pilots were the most likely to be awarded the DFC. It follows that as Jews were under-represented as pilots, they would have had lower odds of being decorated.

Overall, it may be concluded that Jewish volunteers had a substantial preference for Air Force service. They encountered no systemic barriers to entry, and they were appropriately recognized over the course of the war for their skills, valour, and devotion to duty. They may in fact have found a more accepting environment in the Air Force than in the civilian life they left behind. If there was a glass ceiling that Jews were less able to penetrate in the Air Force during those years, it was as commander of an operational unit. Informally at least, within senior ranks, Jewish leadership potential appears to have been less recognized and, at least at the outset, perhaps even regarded as suspect.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> According to the Canadian Jewish Congress, of a total of 8892 Jewish service personnel in 1943, 4009 were in the RCAF (Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: the Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community*, Toronto: Stoddart, 1998, 212). By war's end, about 17,000 Jews had enlisted, according to Max Bookman, "Canadian Jews in Uniform," in Eli Gottesman, ed. *Canadian Jewish Reference Book and Directory* (Ottawa: Jewish Institute of Higher Research, 1963), 111-128. In contrast, Jewish participation in the Army (especially its combat units) and in the Navy was, as Tulchinsky noted, below national levels. Jews constituted 1.5% of Canada's population in 1940, 2.6% of its airmen, 1.4% of its soldiers, and 0.7% of its sailors.

<sup>2</sup> 245 of a total of 420, compared to a national proportion of 18,000 of a total of 42,000 (all figures approximate). The Air Force included (in addition to air crew) substantial contingents of non-flying personnel such as ground crew, radar technicians, administration, and the like. Almost all deaths were of flying personnel.

<sup>3</sup> Wilfred Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven: The Story of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim of Montreal, 1846-1996* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 2000), 138-39, 451. The number of the congregation's war dead is approximate as there are conflicting lists, but the proportion stands.

<sup>4</sup> *There I Was...A Collection of Reminiscences by Members of the Ottawa Jewish Community who Served in World War II*. Ottawa Post of the Jewish War Veterans and Ottawa Jewish Historical Society, n.p. n.d.

<sup>5</sup> The BCATP was established by agreement between Great Britain and Canada in December 1939 and became operational in April 1940. Canada provided the territory and funding to train men from all parts of the Empire for service in Britain's Royal Air Force.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* London: Pimlico, 2006), 278.

<sup>7</sup> *Percy and Joe Jacobson collection*, Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives (CJCCCNA), P0094, Percy Jacobson diary (MC30-02-01).

<sup>8</sup> There was of course, as Tulchinsky relates (*op.cit.* 206-209), a great range of thought and action among young Jewish Canadians about enlisting. For comparative but not identical perspectives, see Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews, How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge MA: Belknap, 2004), 22-48.

<sup>9</sup> Percy and Joe Jacobson collection, Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives (CJCCCNA), P0094, Percy Jacobson diary (MC30-02-01).

<sup>10</sup> Allan D. English, *The Cream of the Crop* (Canada: McGill-Queen's, 1996), 25, fn. 45; Patricia Roy, "The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want: Her Chinese and Japanese Citizens," *Canadian Historical Review* 59.3 (1978): 341-358.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Roy, *op.cit.*, 349.

<sup>12</sup> In 1942 the RAF recruited several dozen men from the British West Indies for aircrew, who trained in Canada under the BCATP, as well as men from India and the African colonies. This was done not only for military need but also to win hearts and minds in the non-self governing parts of the Empire. By war's end, a number of these men had been commissioned and received decorations. It would appear that most recruits from these places were "coloured," in the terminology of the day, although precise data are not available as race was not recorded systematically upon attestation. The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), AIR2/6876, *Coloured RAF Personnel: Report on Progress and Suitability*, and accompanying lists. Black Canadians were accepted only as ground crew, however. See *For My Country, Black Canadians on the Field of Honour*, Minister of National Defence (Canada, 2004), 37.

<sup>13</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG24/E8/18180, Air Force Recruiting Bulletin 62, 25 June 1940.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, English, *op.cit.*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> There are no statistics on rejected applications. These would have occurred on medical, age, or educational grounds, but in view of the high rate of Jewish enlistment in the early stages of the BCATP, almost certainly not on adverse judgments of Jewish character. Such judgments may, as we shall see, have affected progress rather than entry.

<sup>16</sup> The sample is drawn from the BCATP's wireless operator course 3, and air observer course 7, beginning in July and August 1940 respectively. I selected these two classes in the course of research on two family members who trained in them. I examined the attestation papers of 50 men from these two classes known to have died in service during the war. These attestation papers are in the individual service files of Canadian military personnel killed in World War Two (LAC, RG24). The sample frame for wireless

course 3 is the list of 59 successful graduates. 22 of these men were killed, providing a sample of 22. The frame for course 7 is the list of the top half of the class, amounting to 39 men (*BCATP Aircrew (Air Observers) (RCAF), Appointments to Commissions*, 27 March 1941, placed on the service file of each course 7 pupil who qualified), of whom 18 were killed, plus ten of the remaining 35 members of the class that I have been able to identify who were subsequently killed, for a total frame of 49, and a sample of 28. The combined sample amounts to 50 men. I have assumed that these 50 are reasonably representative of the approximately 750 men who graduated from classes 3 and 5 of #1 Initial Training School in the summer of 1940 and went on to the various trade schools.

<sup>17</sup> Just as there were senior university administrators who regarded Jewish students with disdain in the 1930s, and sought to minimize their entry (Michael Brown, "On Campus in the Thirties: Antipathy, Support, and Indifference," in L. Ruth Klein, ed., *Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses* (Canada: McGill-Queen's, 2012), 144-82. There was likely, in Canada, an as yet unexplored commonality between the educational and military establishments in their self-perceived role as guardians of the values, standards, and achievements of Canada's British and Christian foundations. For an American consideration (although by no means necessarily an analogue), see Joseph Bendersky, *The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> LAC, RG24 individual service files (names omitted). I examined 53 files (22%) of Jewish airmen killed in service, weighted non-randomly toward those who enlisted in the first half of the war. Each file contains (among other things) the individual's Attestation Paper and interview report upon enlistment, Medical Board report during initial training, and pupil reports at progressive stages of trades training along with the final evaluation upon graduation.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, *There I was*, *op.cit.*, Shuchat, *op.cit.*, Tulchinsky, *op. cit.*, and *Valour & Duty: Honouring Jewish Veterans of World War II* (Congregation Emanu-El, Victoria, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Based on an examination of over 100 individual service files of non-Jewish aircrew casualties (LAC, RG24, *op.cit.*).

<sup>21</sup> The tabulation is derived from two primary sources. The first, *Canadian Jews in World War II, Part II: Casualties* (Canadian Jewish

Congress, Montreal, 1948), lists all Jews known at that time to have been killed in the Canadian Armed Forces during World War II. The individual biographies vary substantially but provide, at a minimum, name, rank, service number, and branch of service, and in some cases age, home town, and date of enlistment. Circumstances of death and place of burial are often incomplete or inaccurate because this information was not always known at the time of publication. The second source, Les Allison and Howard Hayward, *They Shall Grow Not Old* (Brandon MB, Canadian Air Training Plan Museum, 1991), provides short standardized biographies of all persons killed while serving in the uniform of the RCAF during World War II. These biographies also provide name, rank, service number, age, and hometown. In addition they indicate air trade, final rank, final unit, as well as more complete and accurate information on cause and place of death, and place of burial or commemoration; however date of enlistment is not included. Both sources include about 20 Jews resident in the United States, and a few from other parts of the Commonwealth, who chose to enlist in the RCAF. Some of these may have been Canadians by birth. However neither source includes Canadians who enlisted in allied forces other than those of Great Britain. In some instances I have supplemented the tabulation with information derived from the on-line data base of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and from individual service files in Library and Archives Canada. My data set captures, by individual: age, residence, date of enlistment (incomplete), service number, air trade, final rank, final unit, cause of death, place killed, and (if known) place buried. Where the two sources conflict, I have chosen the information I consider the more accurate, which usually is from the second source. There are minor discrepancies of identification: a few individuals listed in one publication are not listed in the other. I have not yet resolved these discrepancies but they would involve not more than one percent of the total.

<sup>22</sup> The BCATP did not provide for a separate stream for air gunners; those who failed the wireless portion of the course were generally graduated as air gunners. Air gunners were also trained in England.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, E.S. Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen: a Portrait of the British Officer* (London: Michael Joseph, 1956), and Cathy Downes, *Special Trust and Confidence: The Making of an Officer* (London: Frank Cass, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> See English, *op.cit.*; and F. J. Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, 1939-45* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, Directorate of History, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> See particularly W.A.B. Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 221, 250. I have focused primarily the experience of Jews in the RCAF in the early years of the war, particularly in Canada during training, rather than on their subsequent experience overseas. In the early years of the war, Canadians were posted to RAF units upon their arrival in Britain where, apart from pay and discipline, they were subject to the conditions of service and the culture of the RAF. From 1942 onwards, they were posted mainly to RCAF squadrons in 6 Group, where different policies applied to commissioning.

<sup>26</sup> June 1942 and March 1945 totals from Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, D.Hist 74/7 *RCAF Personnel History 1939-1941, vol. 1*. In early 1942, when the new heavy bombers came into general service with larger crews, the air observer's role was split between navigator and bomb aimer, and the training program was altered accordingly to accommodate these two separate trade streams. For the purposes of this analysis I have amalgamated all types of navigators and bomb-aimers under the general category of air observers for the duration of the war. Also in 1942, the requirement for a second pilot was discontinued, and a separate category of flight engineer was created. This reduced the proportion of recruits requiring pilot training.

<sup>27</sup> English, *op.cit.* 24.

<sup>28</sup> When the question of whether air observers should become captains arose early in the war, the Chief of Bomber Command argued forcefully against it (TNA, AIR14/753, *Present status and responsibilities of an observer in relation to those of a pilot*, 17 December 1941). Thus even a less experienced sergeant pilot would be in command of a more experienced commissioned air observer.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Tulchinsky, *op.cit.*, 216-17.

<sup>30</sup> Joe Jacobson to Pony Club, CJCCNA, P0094, MC30-01-22. Jacobson was in Course 5 at #1 ITS in Toronto, which commenced on 22 July 1940.

<sup>31</sup> It was a view that most definitely applied to non-white aircrew. There was a very strong reluctance in the RAF, which did not diminish over

the course of the war, to allow black pilots to act as captains of white crew (TNA, AIR2/6876, *op.cit.*).

<sup>32</sup> According to recent research by Martin Sugarman in *Fighting Back*, “More than Just a Few” (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2010), Jews accounted for about one percent of pilots and aircrew in the Battle of Britain, or more than twice the proportion of Jews in Britain’s population. Of the 42 Jewish aircrew he identified, 22 were pilots, five were air observers (not including seven individuals whose trade was unidentified). As fighter aircraft were flown solo, the issue of Jewish leadership of a gentile crew would not have arisen. Canadian Jews, however, flew almost exclusively as members of crews in larger aircraft in Bomber and Coastal Commands. William Henry Nelson (DFC and bar) of Montreal, who joined the RAF in 1937, is listed both in *Canadian Jews in World War II*, *op.cit.* and in Sugarman, *op.cit.*

<sup>33</sup> DFCs (for commissioned personnel) and DFMs (for NCOs), were awarded for acts of valour and courage or devotion to duty performed whilst flying in active operations against the enemy.

<sup>34</sup> *Canadian Jews in World War II, Part I: Decorations* (Canadian Jewish Congress, Montreal, 1948). The trades of three recipients were not specified.